

*** NETANSWERS INTERNET EXTRA ***

*** Number 58: FTP ***

FTP is one of the ancient Internet tools. It has been around as long as e-mail, and much longer than the Web. But unlike some other early Internet tools, FTP is still useful and still very much in use today.

FTP stands for File Transfer Protocol. It's a system for moving files between computers on the Internet. When you download a program from the Internet, chances are it's coming to you through the magic of FTP.

You may have used FTP and not even realized it. That's because your Web browser includes the capability to download files with FTP. Just as it can fetch information from Web servers, your browser can get files from FTP servers. (Web addresses, as you've likely seen, start with `http://`. FTP addresses start with `ftp://`.) So, FTP and the Web are both useful for downloading files from the Internet. When you're using your Web browser to download a file, it doesn't really matter to you whether the file is coming from a Web server or an FTP server.

-.-.- Anonymous and full-privilege FTP -.-.-

If you have two computers on the Internet, you can use FTP to move files between them. But FTP is most used to access public archives of software. Gargantuan libraries of software are available for the taking using "anonymous FTP". Thousands of sites provide anonymous FTP service, allowing you to download everything from electronic books and magazines, to clip art, to utilities and games for your personal computer.

Anonymous FTP means that a computer is available for anyone to use. You don't need your own account on that remote computer; all you need is the not-so-secret word: anonymous. (Actually, the term anonymous FTP is a misnomer. When you access an anonymous FTP site, you are not necessarily anonymous at all. In fact, many sites insist that you "sign in" using your e-mail address as a password. Your browser or FTP client will do this for you.)

There's another kind of FTP: full-privilege FTP is the opposite of anonymous FTP. It allows you to send and receive files from a computer that you have explicit access to. For instance, if you're at home and need to get a file from the office computer, you might use full-privilege FTP to fetch it. Because it's a private computer with private information, you'll have to have a username and password to access its files -- the rest of the Internet populace won't be able to get in.

-.-.- Use Your Browser or an FTP Client -.-.-

The FTP capability that's built into your Web browser is fine for occasional file transfers, but heavier FTP users may want to use a separate FTP client. These are programs devoted to transferring files to and from FTP servers -- they provide handy file transfer functions lacking in your Web browser. As Stroud's Consummate List of Winsock Applications puts it, "Standalone clients retain more functionality and features than the internal FTP clients found in browsers. For the serious file-grabbing netizen, a standalone FTP client is the only feasible option."

The biggest benefits of stand-alone FTP clients include the abilities to download batches of files at once or queue files for sequential download. Also, you may be able to resume a download that was did not complete (due to a modem disconnection, for instance.) There are many other benefits for serious file-shufflers, such as the abilities to upload files, change the permissions of files on FTP servers, and provide easy access to full-privilege FTP sites. Remember, every FTP client is different and may not have every feature -- as the car commercials say, "your mileage may vary."

If you use a PC, you have many choices when it comes to an FTP client. CuteFTP, a \$25 shareware program, is one of the most popular (<http://www.cuteftp.com>). Other fine options are FTP Voyager (\$37.95 shareware, available from <http://www.ftpvoyager.com>) and FTP Control (\$29 shareware, available from <http://www.ftpcontrol.com>).

On the Mac, there are two excellent FTP clients: Fetch and Anarchie Pro. You can fetch Fetch from <ftp://mirror.apple.com/mirrors/Info-Mac.Archive/comm/inet/fetch-303.hqx> or download Anarchie Pro from <http://www.stairways.com/anarchie/>. Both are worth trying and work well, but have very different interfaces.

=*=*= SOFTWARE MENTIONED IN THIS ISSUE =*=*=

For your PC --

CuteFTP: <http://www.cuteftp.com>

FTP Voyager: <http://www.ftpvoyager.com>

FTP Control: <http://www.ftpcontrol.com>

For your Mac --

Fetch: <ftp://mirror.apple.com/mirrors/Info-Mac.Archive/comm/inet/fetch-303.hqx>

Anarchie Pro: <http://www.stairways.com/anarchie/>

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The NetAnswers Internet Extra is free to all CompuServe members. It's available in the Internet New Users Forum (GO INETNEW) in file library 11, "NetAnswers".

Got comments or ideas for future issues? We want to hear 'em. Just send a message to savetz@compuserve.com (74774,2725).

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